

# **Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation**

## **Full Commission Retreat**

### **Meeting Summary**

**September 8-9, 1999**

#### **Commission members present:**

Doug Beighle, Rick Bender, Peter Bennett, Commissioner Ted Bottiger, Don Briscoe, Greg Devereux, Roger Dormaier, Councilmember Dave Earling, Representative Ruth Fisher, Jim Fitzgerald, Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Robert Helsell, Doug Hurley, Peter Hurley, Commissioner Bettie Ingham, John Kelly, Bill Lampson, Councilmember Richard McIver, Representative Maryann Mitchell, Tomio Moriguchi, Charles Mott, Representative Ed Murray, Connie Niva, Commissioner Patricia Notter, Patricia Otley, Larry Pursley, John Rindlaub, Mike Roberts, Skip Rowley, Randy Scott, Representative Karen Schmidt, Ken Smith, Commissioner Judie Stanton, Dale Stedman, Commissioner Judy Wilson

#### **Commission members not present:**

Bob Dilger, Governor Booth Gardner, Senator Valoria Loveland, Neil Peterson, Senator Dino Rossi, Senator George Sellar

### **Introduction**

Chairman Doug Beighle welcomed members to the retreat and announced the appointment of two new Commissioners: Marty Brown, representing the Governor, appointed to the Steering Committee, and Randy Scott, representing the United Tribes of Washington, to the Administration Committee. Mr. Beighle said the purpose of the retreat was to exchange ideas and bring together the work of the three committees. He said it was intended as a working session and the Commission would take no positions. There would be no formal public comment period.

Mr. Beighle announced that the Commission had received a response from the Attorney General's office to his letter asking about Initiative 695. The letter stated that the Commission was legally not allowed to take a position or make any findings with respect to the Initiative. Commissioners, acting as private citizens, may speak, but must not do so in their role as Commissioners. He urged members to keep their personal actions separate from those of the Commission so as not to cloud any of the group's efforts.

Mr. Beighle introduced Gerry Cormick as the day's facilitator. He said he viewed the retreat as a transition from the first, information-gathering phase, to beginning the work of putting together recommendations. The purpose of the retreat was to begin to develop concurrence on a package of solutions.

## **Presentation of Committee Findings**

Doug Hurley, Chairman of the Administration Committee, introduced his committee's findings in four topic areas: governance, permitting, efficiencies in operation and maintenance and in project delivery. The committee found that transportation governance seems to work best when authority for planning, funding and implementation rests with one body. Permitting regulations exist in overwhelming quantity and layers, but the foundation for reform exists. Efficiencies can be achieved with some form of managed competition. Other efficiencies are possible with alternative project delivery systems.

Dale Stedman, Chairman of the Investment Strategies Committee reported that his committee had looked at four areas: needs exceed funding, congestion, infrastructure condition, land use and economic development. He said the most obvious of the committee's findings was the tremendous cost of the transportation problems. The public sector already spends some \$3.7 billion per year, with the private sector spending an additional \$11 billion annually. There is projected to be a \$50 billion shortfall in funding over 20 years.

Skip Rowley, chairman of the Revenue Committee, reported that his committee had developed findings in the areas of: the structure of transportation funding, local funding, the distribution of the gas tax, non-traditional funding, market mechanisms and public opinions on transportation funding. The committee found that the funding system is complicated, unwieldy and inflexible. It had looked at a wide range of issues and solutions and had taken none of them off the table yet.

## **Discussion of Draft Summary Findings**

Mr. Cormick introduced a summary document that incorporated all of the committee findings and added a set of Steering Committee findings describing the context and filling in certain gaps. Commissioners proceeded to discuss the individual findings, offer suggestions and direct that some findings be returned to the committees for clarification or additional language. Discussion ensued until the lunch break and then continued after lunch until mid-afternoon.

## **Draft Benchmarks**

Chairman Beighle announced that he was postponing the discussion of the opinion poll results until the next day and proceeding directly to the discussion of benchmarks. John Rindlaub introduced the topic of benchmarks. Benchmarks are measures of best practices. They establish goals and assist in channeling resources toward those goals. He said whatever benchmarks were agreed upon, they must be 1) few in number and 2) easily communicable to the public.

For transportation benchmarks, out of a universe of possible benchmarks, the BRCT has chosen system performance benchmarks to give a 'big picture' overview of how the state's transportation system is performing.

Kathy Elias of the BRCT staff described the eight draft benchmarks chosen by the BRCT Steering Committee. They cover the areas of maintenance, safety, mobility, freight movement, trade and air quality. She said that the proposed benchmarks had been selected to be measurable and with a view to being based on data already available, whenever possible. It was asked who is going to be responsible for the benchmarks. If funding is one of the principal problems with the system, then what is the point of having benchmarks? It was replied that the BRCT needs to decide what goals it is trying to achieve, and how much money it is going to cost to get there. A concern was expressed that if the benchmarks become institutionalized, some day they might become requirements for funding. It was suggested that system-wide measures could be used for such things as maintenance and safety, as a way of including transportation modes other than the highways.

Discussion ensued about the individual benchmarks. Commissioners offered numerous suggestions. It was agreed that follow-up work was needed to gather additional data and determine the most appropriate measures of the transportation system. It was suggested that a benchmark committee work on developing the proposal and bring it back to a later meeting.

### **Public Opinion Research Results**

Rick Cocker of the BRCT communications staff presented the findings of the telephone survey conducted by the Commission. The survey was conducted by Moore Information during August 19 to 23, 1999. Eight hundred registered voters from around the state were interviewed. Three statewide themes emerged: The majority want money spent more efficiently; transportation safety and better maintenance are priorities; there is recognition that population is growing rapidly and that if nothing is done, the transportation system will be overwhelmed.

Beyond the statewide themes, there were a number of regional differences. Traffic congestion is the biggest concern in Seattle and in King County, but potholes and bad roads are the greatest concern in Eastern Washington. Mr. Cocker emphasized that subset samples are small, but the regional differences show that communication strategies should be tailored to specific geographic areas. He also stated that the results are not for use in making policy recommendations, but rather for communication purposes.

## **Framework for BRCT Recommendations**

Gerry Cormick presented ideas for a process to move toward a recommendation package. He suggested first developing criteria to evaluate proposed solutions. The criteria should test base viability of any proposal and allow comparison among solutions. He also suggested what the elements of a package might be and introduced the concept of a “stalking horse” document that would lay out options.

## **Brainstorming Session on Message Development**

Lead by Anne Fennessy of the BRCT staff team, members participated in a session to develop public messages. The brainstorming was organized around the following questions:

- What the Public Should Hear from the Commission
- What We Need to Know From the Public
- Points to get across to the Public
- Who's the Audience?
- Constituencies, Stakeholders - What they need to hear
- Strategy
- Mobility-Congestion-Alternatives
- Needs for Increased Spending
- Efficiencies, Coordination & Priorities
- Maintenance
- Safety Issues